

The Japanese Agent

Though the public knew nothing about it, we at Scotland Yard suffered a good deal of anxiety during the earlier phases of the great struggle in the east from the presence in England of agents of the Japanese and Russian governments engaged in buying contraband of war. These gentlemen had a rough-and-ready way with each other, when their interests clashed, which sometimes ended in a paragraph in the paper with the stereotyped heading, "Body Found in the Thames."

Therefore the extraordinary story which reached us on a beautiful morning in early summer had on the face of it nothing that was improbable, and the course taken by the authorities was undoubtedly the correct one under circumstances of peculiar difficulty.

When, in answer to an urgent summons, I presented myself in the room of the chief commissioner, I found with him a gentleman whose name was very familiar to me as that of an investigator of social mysteries which, when solved, are not destined to tickle the ears of the public. His reputation was, perhaps, unique in that respect, inasmuch as it almost invariably escaped the fierce, all-sifting crucible of the law courts.

On entering the room, after saluting my chief, I glanced at Mr. Radford Shone in some curiosity. He possessed, at any rate, that first qualification for a detective—you could not tell at sight whether he was a wise man or a fool. His large eyes, ruminative as those of a cow in a clover field, might have been taken for contemplative observation, or so baffling were they, they might have veiled chronic stupidity. One thing about him there was no mistaking—his frock coat and gloves and glossy hair came from Bond Street.

"Inspector Michaels," the chief began, "this gentleman, Mr. Radford Shone, has been acting on behalf of the Russian government in watching Japanese contraband operations in this country. Of course, Mr. Shone's position is that of a private individual to collect information. He has no official locus standi, and so—"

"Pardon me," Mr. Shone interrupted with great dignity. "I have no power to arrest, or I should not be here, but my relations with the Russian government are not only official, but extremely confidential."

The chief bowed in his most delightful manner. "Then," said he with a smile, "in Russia you would undoubtedly enjoy the position which is denied to you here, and possibly on that score would be entitled to our sympathy. But, as I was saying, Michaels, Mr. Shone has reached an impasse in his work, which calls, in the first place, for inquiry on our part, and it may be, later on, for action. Be good enough, Mr. Shone, to repeat for the inspector's benefit the information which you have just given me."

Now I know our worthy chief's little ways, and to listen to a wordy repetition was not one of them, when I had been given Mr. Radford Shone's yarn and his own instructions as well in half the time. I made a shrewd guess that Sir Walter wanted to compare our visitor's second statement with the notes he had made of the first. At any rate, he kept glancing at the hieroglyphic covered sheet before him while Shone disburdened himself.

It appeared that one Schouvalinski, a Russian agent, had unearthed the fact that the Japanese were having a submarine boat constructed at the yard of a yacht builder on the Itchen, a mile or two above Southampton Water. In the exercise of his duties Schouvalinski had kept a close watch on the yard, and, being apprehensive of his personal safety, had enlisted the services of Radford Shone to protect him from the Japanese, who were known to be lurking in the neighborhood.

The narrator had reached this point when the chief raised his hand.

"I can see, Michaels," he said, "that you are wondering at the necessity of all this fuss. Why don't we step in and embargo the submarine as contraband of war? The answer is, that the boat does not become contraband till it is handed over to the purchaser to be shipped to its destination."

I nodded, and Shone proceeded to relate how he had discovered that Takishura, the Japanese agent, had become so irritated by Schouvalinski's attentions that he had planned to murder his Russian rival that very night. Shone had got his information from the foreman of the yard, a young man named Tremayne, who was also the designer of the vessel.

Tremayne, having gained the confidence of Takishura, had learned the particulars of the Japanese project, which was the simple one of stabling Schouvalinski after dark and throwing his body into the river.

Shone ended his lurid recital, and from the apparent reserve of the latter gave at his notes. I concluded that there had been no glaring flaw in the second version.

"What we have to do is to prevent the attempt," Michaels, the chief said, turning to me. "Any trouble of the kind would lead to all sorts of international complications, and I want you to run down to Southampton with Mr. Shone and give him the benefit of official backing. They will have to be guided by what you find on the spot and by the enlightenment on minor details which Mr. Shone will give you on the journey down. From what he hinted there is a woman in the case."

"That ought to simplify matters," I said, noting the twinkle in the chief's eye. "Is the lady a Japanese or a Russian?"

"She is neither," Shone put in pompously. "She is an English girl, the daughter of Abraham Goulding, the owner of the yacht building yard. Takishura has been making up to her, though young Tremayne has had hopes in that quarter. You will find that it is a very pretty little case of jealousy and revenge, Inspector Michaels, if you will be guided by my data."

The chief signed that the interview was over; but as I reached the door in the wake of our informant he beckoned me back. I was at his side in an instant. Shone was already outside.

"There's some funny game on, Michaels," Sir Walter whispered. "Whether that fellow is a player or a pawn in it will be for you to discover. Do your best, as you always do, but—there! a nod's as good as a wink to you."

In the train Shone furnished me with the "data" of which he had spoken. Young Tremayne had informed him that Takishura would be working late that night in the construction yard, the

The Solutions of Radford Shone

submarine being nearly completed. As in duty bound, Schouvalinski would be prowling about spying on him, and the Japanese had hinted that he should once for all put an end to the Russian's espionage by murdering him.

"Rather confiding of Mr. Takishura to compromise himself to his rival, was it not?" I asked, as Shone seemed to wait for my applause.

From the opposite corner of the compartment he looked me over with undisguised pity. "My dear sir," he rejoined, "you have not worked with me before, or you would never have put that question. Takishura revealed nothing to Tremayne. I, Radford Shone, got the bare facts from him and inferred the rest from my knowledge that Takishura has been stalking Schouvalinski with a knife. It was then easy for a man of my calibre to scrape acquaintance with the Japanese himself and to gain his confidence in the character of a sympathizer. I had the particulars of his intentions at first hand."

To myself, accustomed to regard the Japs as masterpieces of cleverness and reticence, Mr. Takishura's conduct seemed, to say the least of it, peculiar. To divulge a murderous project such as he entertained was in direct contradiction to the national characteristics. I remembered, however, that Radford Shone had won a great reputation for subtlety, and I could only conclude that he carried too many guns for the wily Oriental.

As the train neared Southampton I could see that Shone was growing fidgety about the course I should pursue, and pay him out for the superior tone he had adopted toward me. I deferred his enlightenment to the last moment. It was only when we were leaving the station that I sketched my program.

"You and I must part company here, Mr. Radford Shone," I said, as we stood on the curb. "It would be bad policy for these cunning foreigners to see your genius in the company of my official position. I shall run down to the neighborhood of Goulding's yard and have a look around. You can meet me, say, at Taylor's hotel at Northam at 6 o'clock to conclude final arrangements."

Shone regarded me with a doubtful stare, but my tribute to his "genius" carried the day. "You won't get talking to Schouvalinski if you come across him?" he said, with affected carelessness. "I shouldn't wish him to be made aware of the danger from which I am saving him till afterward. It might make him nervous and prevent your capture of Takishura."

"Make your mind easy," I replied. "If I talk to anyone it will be to Tremayne and his faithful girl—just to establish a footing, you know, for being on the spot tonight. But I'll post you fully when we meet at the hotel."

Seeing that he was reluctant to leave me, I took the drastic course of shaking him off by jumping on an electric car, which quickly whirled me to the yacht builder's quarter. A dive down a side street brought me to the river front, where I soon came to a pair of close wooden gates set in a high wall, surmounted by the inscription "Abraham Goulding, Yacht Builder and Ship Chandler." Alongside the gates, flush with the street, was a private dwelling house with the same name on the front door, showing that the proprietor resided on the scene of his labors. It was obviously impossible to gain access to the yard from that side of the river without ringing the bell either of the yard or of Mr. Goulding's residence, and after a moment's consideration I chose the former.

My summons was answered by a sharp-faced youth with a pen behind his ear. "Is Mr. Takishura in the yard?" I inquired, in pursuance of the definite line I had laid down.

The question was met by blank amazement on the part of the clerk.

"I don't think so," he stammered. "It'll be pretty bad for him if he is and the governor catches him. Are you a pal of his?"

"No, I only wanted a word with him on a matter of business," I replied. "Well, then, you'd better go to his business address," the youth snapped, and would have slammed the gate in my face had not a young man in his shirt sleeves, very grimy and hot, pushed him aside.

"What is it, Alf?" demanded the newcomer, shortly.

"The gent has called for Mr. Takishura," giggled the lad. "I told him this was the wrong shop for Japs, and he'd best clear out. That was right, wasn't it, Mr. Tremayne?"

So this good-looking young man with the sooty face and hands was the primary source of Mr. Radford Shone's information. I cast a shrewd glance at him, and in so doing encountered a return glance in which there was also shrewdness, but I fancied a trace of apprehension as well.

"Come inside, sir," he said. "Perhaps I can be of service to you. Sit and bolt the gate, Alf, and see that we are not disturbed."

Mr. Tremayne led the way to an office to the left. It was but a step or two that we had to traverse, but in those few paces I got a comprehensive glimpse of the yard. I saw workshops all around the inclosing walls, except where, on the right of the gateway, Mr. Goulding's house showed a brave array of window boxes ablaze with geraniums and lobelia. At the far end, the only uninclosed side, ran the tidal river, with the construction shed dipping from the bank into the sluggish stream.

The foreman pointed to the only chair in the office, and perched himself on the clerk's high stool. I rather liked the young man's face, the normal expression of which I judged was frankness itself, though just now he struck me as harassed by an unexpected emergency.

"Am I right in believing that you are a friend of Mr. Radford Shone?" he asked rather nervously.

"Hardly that," I replied. "I never saw him before today. I am Detective Inspector Michaels, of Scotland Yard, and my object is to prevent a row between a Jap and a Russian, who are interested in a submarine boat which is being built here—for the Japanese government, Mr. Shone informed us."

The ghost of a smile flickered over Tremayne's perturbed face. "And you," he said, "being a trained official and not a brilliant expert, have already spotted that Shone has not been telling you the truth—the whole truth and all the rest of it, eh?"

"It did not need a genius to argue,



from your clerk's reception of my inquiry for Mr. Shone, that the boat is not being built for the Japanese," I replied.

"Ah, I thought that Shone would have told you that the boat is being built for the Russians," said Tremayne, evidently weighing his words. "He's been hanging about here for a week, and I do not reckon him as one to follow the straight path."

Before I could answer him the office door was flung open, and in bounced a handsome, dark-eyed girl, in a high state of excitement.

"Oh, Fred, it's too annoying for anything," she cried, not seeing me. "That old wretch Schouvalinski is having tea with father, and Mr. Takishura came along the street and met a face at him through the parlor window. Schouvalinski is in such a fright that he swears he won't leave the house to-night, and he has sent for Radford Shone to come and watch the submarine."

Tremayne had been making unavailing signals to her, but not till the end of her breathless recital did she notice my presence. It caused her great consternation.

"Who is this, Fred?" she demanded, in an awestruck whisper.

"It is a detective from Scotland Yard, Bella. Shone has been to the police," was the young foreman's reply, accompanied by a significant glance.

"Oh, dear," the girl murmured, and there was that in her tone that told of a disappointment too deep for words. I remembered what Sir Walter had said about there being a "game" on, but for the present I could not make head or tail of it, except that Radford Shone had been lying to us. Here was the submarine boat being built for the Russians, and not for the Japs; and here was Miss Bella Goulding, who, according to Shone, was carrying on with Mr. Takishura, on confidential terms with the lover whom she was supposed to have discarded.

A silence followed. Miss Bella's exclamation, and then I took up my parable.

"Now, look here, you two love birds," I said. "Shone has been trying to fool me, and I have found him out. If you for the present could not make head or tail of it, except that Radford Shone had been lying to us. Here was the submarine boat being built for the Russians, and not for the Japs; and here was Miss Bella Goulding, who, according to Shone, was carrying on with Mr. Takishura, on confidential terms with the lover whom she was supposed to have discarded."

A silence followed. Miss Bella's exclamation, and then I took up my parable.

provided that you are not breaking the law."

The two looked at each other, and then Miss Bella looked at me.

"We should like to tell him, shouldn't we, Fred?" she murmured archly. "But Tremayne shook his head."

"There's really nothing to tell, Mr. Michaels, except that you can take it from me that there is no murder planned against the governor's Russian client," he said. "Bella and I are courting, as you can see for yourself, and I played a little prank on Shone, merely to get the yard to ourselves after the workmen have knocked off, and while Mr. Goulding, who doesn't favor my suit, is busy with his grog."

"Do I gather that your calculations have been upset by the determination of the Russian to remain in the house, while Shone watches the submarine?" I asked.

"That is so; we are both greatly disappointed," was Tremayne's reply.

I spoke with every appearance of frankness, and yet I was not satisfied that I had got to the bottom of the "game," as Sir Walter had called it. That the lovers should set to work to hoodwink Shone so elaborately merely to enjoy a stolen interview in the yard seemed improbable, and their chagrin at the breakdown of their project was out of all due proportion to it. From their presence in the office together they did not appear to have much difficulty in meeting each other, and the loss or postponement of their evening tryst could hardly account for such a degree of disappointment.

"Then I am to understand that Takishura's part in the business was to aid and abet you in deceiving Radford Shone—that his planned murder of the Russian was a sort of practical joke, eh?"

"Yes, yes—that was it!" they both chimed in with an eagerness that discounted the value of the admission. So, instead of being Tremayne's rival for the affections of the boat builder's daughter, the Japanese was their ally in thwarting old Mr. Goulding's wishes.

Radford Shone seemed to have mislaid us, partly with intention and partly because he had been misled himself all along the line; and I decided that I must treat both him and this interesting young couple as quite untrustworthy. That being so, it was my duty, in spite of their assurances, to keep observation on the yard that night.

"Well," I said, "I seem to have been

put to a good deal of trouble for nothing, and all the fun I shall have out of it will be to tell Shone how you have fooled him. And the sooner I get back to him the sooner I shall enjoy my laugh," I added as I made for the door.

"And tell him that he can safely stay between the sheets tonight—that Schouvalinski won't need his protection," cried Bella excitedly.

But Tremayne checked her enthusiasm with a frown, and accompanied me to the gate in the yard wall. The young fellow struck me as making a brave fight not to appear ill at ease.

"I am here, Mr. Michaels," he said in a low voice as he drew the bolt, "you have been brought into this by a vain, mercenary idiot who deserves to suffer for his folly. But I should be sorry for you to be put to any inconvenience through no fault of your own. I can see that things must look fishy to you, but I will give you my word of honor that there is no bloodshed in the affair. Takishura is the kindest, nicest little chap in the world, and though he has been told off to shadow Schouvalinski, would no more hurt him than he would you—unless he was cornered!"

There was a glint in the foreman's eye as he uttered the last four words, which almost constituted them a threat.

"Tell me straight what you mean," I answered him. "You see in position to be about to prevent a crime, alleged to be about to be committed by a Japanese upon a Russian, neither of whom have I met. On the face of it the whole thing is a farce, got up to assist a little moonlight lovelorn between you and your young lady. And yet, Mr. Tremayne, I am not altogether a fool. How am I to take your warning as compatible with your assurance that no violence is intended?"

"Take it this way," he replied, after a pause. "Where Radford Shone goes tonight you will probably go. It will be your duty. And, if I am any judge of men, you will do it. But—and he hesitated again, as if groping for his words, "don't keep too close to him—that's all."

He proffered his well-shaped but toll-stained hand, and I grasped it in token that I recognized the friendliness of his intention. Nevertheless, I was far from convinced that the young man's designs were as innocent as he would have me think, and I was conscious of

having so far failed to locate Mr. Takishura's real position in the affair.

Making my way to Taylor's hotel, I found Radford Shone impatiently waiting for me in the smoking room. Confronted by him, I did not feel tempted to practice on the police about the ownership of the submarine. I did not feel bound to enlighten him as to my discoveries, but I contented myself with informing him that I did not apprehend any danger for his client Schouvalinski.

Shone fairly glared at me. "That is as good as saying that I have got hold of a mare's nest," he snorted. "You must have been talking to that minx, Bella Goulding, and she has thrown dust in your eyes. I will prove to you that she has taken you in. Here," and he dragged a letter from his pocket, "read that!"

The scrawl was in French, and requested him to go at once to the yard to "watch that devil Takishura," who was hanging around. It bore Schouvalinski's signature, and was evidently inspired by what Bella Goulding had described as "Takishura making faces through the parlor window."

"This only proves that Schouvalinski is in a mortal funk—probably of nothing at all," I replied. "However, as I presume that you will be carrying out your instructions, I am prepared to go with you."

A little later, after partaking of a rather unsober meal, we started for the yacht building quarter. I was curious as to how Shone would perform his task. As his Russian client was also Mr. Goulding's customer for the submarine, and was skulking in the builder's private residence, Shome's nature course would have been to go straight to the door of the yard or of the house.

But against this was the fact that he had deceived the authorities as to the real purchasers of the boat, and to openly approach the yard in my company would be as good as a confession of duplicity. I anticipated his predicament with considerable amusement.

But Radford Shone was equal to the occasion, being evidently determined to keep up what he believed to be my delusion as to the submarine being a Japanese acquisition. He passed by the yard gate and the house and, leading the way along the street, turned presently to the right, climbed a railway embankment, and crossed a bridge which carried the line over the river.

"It is the only way to get into the

Narratives by Officers of the Provincial Police, as to Dealings with the Eminent Expert, Mr. Radford Shone. Edited by HEADON HILL.

yard unseen," he explained, as we stumbled down the embankment on the other side of the bridge. "I have got a boat here hidden under the bank. We will row over and land on the wharf of Goulding's yard."

On this side of the river, in sharp contrast to the thickly built-up bank from which we had crossed, the water front was more or less in a state of nature. Instead of boat-builders' yards, rope walks, and public houses, green fields stretched to the edge of the tidal stream, with houses scattered over the landscape at frequent intervals. Away across the Itchen there was a fringe of bricks and mortar, of twinkling gas lamps, and of yachts at their mooring berths, where we stood the fringe was mud and rushes, with no light but the starry sky.

Shone found his boat and we pulled leisurely over toward the dim shape of the construction shed at Goulding's yard. To the left of our course the river broadened quickly into the more open reaches of Southampton Water, and there, moored just off the fairway, I saw a large steam yacht anchored. Radford Shone, I thought, eyed her with interest. A little farther seaward another vessel's lights were visible, but beyond making out that she was a steamer with two funnels, I could not judge in the gloom whether she was a yacht or a trader.

A flight of stone steps ran down from Goulding's yard to the water, and, having hitched our boat to an iron ring, we mounted to the level above. Save in one corner, where the windows of the proprietor's house made splashes of light, the enclosure was in darkness, and appeared to be deserted. Close at hand the construction shed reared its ungainly frame, as though sliding into the river, and somewhat to my surprise I noticed that the folding doors on the landward side were open. I peered in, and by the faint reflection from the gas lamp over the yard gate I saw the submarine on the slip way, all ready to be launched—a shining, cigar-shaped structure of copper, its vicious snout pointing downward toward the closed doors on the side of the shed abutting on the river. Beneath the slip way the rising tides lapped weirdly among the piles.

Suddenly Shone, who had kept very close to my elbow, touched me on the arm and whispered:

"Hush! Some one is coming."

We drew into the shadows of the side of the shed, and waited as a dim form flitted noiselessly into view from the direction of the gate from the road. As it neared us I was able to make out that it was short and thick-set, and, coming nearer still, its features were distinguishable—the little, slitty eyes and oval face of a Japanese. The figure passed into the construction shed, and a light metallic clang followed.

"Takishura!" Shone breathed in my ear. "Didn't I tell you he meant murder?"

The situation was certainly growing interesting, but I couldn't resist treating it from the standpoint which Shone had endeavored to foist upon me. Surely there's nothing strange in the Jap coming to look after his own boat?" I whispered. "Naturally, he has the run of the yard."

I heard Shone grind his teeth, but he was saved an answer by a sound that claimed our attention from the interior of the shed. We heard distinctly the scrooping of iron cog wheels and the gurgle of water. It was not difficult to guess that Mr. Takishura was working the mechanism that opened the doors of the construction shed on the river side. This proceeding seemed greatly to agitate Mr. Shone, but it did not come within the four corners of my instructions, which were to protect Schouvalinski. As the Russian was probably safe in the house, hobnobbing with Mr. Goulding, I was not concerned.

"I must see what he is doing," murmured Shone. "You are a policeman, and have authority to arrest him. Come inside."

"Not me," I replied, mindful of Tremayne's warning. "By your own showing the Jap is only playing with his own pretenses. It's better to stop him, knifing Schouvalinski. Time enough for me to appear when the Russian shows up."

With a muttered oath Shone left me, and, gliding across the yard, he vanished into the interior. At the same instant I heard the scurry of footsteps coming from the house, and, I thought, the swish of a woman's skirts. Directly afterward I was sure, Bella Goulding, a fleshy shaven over her head, fitted by my lurking place, and was also swallowed up in the shed. Her advent was hailed by a chuckling laugh in Tremayne's mellow tenor, and by a smothered raucousness in the rasping voice of Shone.

"Take your hands off me, Mr. Tremayne. What does this mean? I have help at hand," he half threatened, half pleaded.

"I don't think Inspector Michaels has any cause to intervene," came the young man's reply, coldly incisive now. "The information you gave him, that this is a Japanese submarine, constitutes you a trespasser, and it is therefore my duty to stop you. I have to stop him, knifing Schouvalinski. Time enough for me to appear when the Russian shows up."

"Certainly," was the answer, in a high-pitched tone. "The sluice gates are open and everything is in readiness. But keep your hands off the starting lever, in case your friend of the police doesn't approve of our stratagem."

"It is too late for him to object," followed Tremayne's reply. "Here, Mr. Michaels, come round and see a bit of fun. I know you're out there somewhere, and you deserve to be free of the show."

The "show," as I went and stood at the door of the construction shed, was certainly impressive. The double gates, giving on the river, were open now, and on the slipway lay the submarine boat as before, but with a section of her turtle back raised, disclosing a group of curiously assorted faces. In the stern of the boat abut the glass dome of the conning tower. A glow of electric light from the interior of the boat played on